



WOMEN & THE ECONOMY

Women's Work: Paying It Forward

By Joanna L. Krotz



Josephine Kairaba (Rwanda), Anna Grishchenkova (Russia) and Hussan-Bano Burki (Pakistan) interact with Ambassador Melanne Verveer at the Global Mentoring Partnership meeting. Sharon Farmer/Vital Voices

A one-to-one mentoring program set up by the Fortune Most Powerful Women Summit and the U.S. State Department connects America's top businesswomen with young women leaders around the world to strengthen careers and communities.

“It’s easy to get things done with women,” says Ilham Zhiri, sipping a latte and nibbling a muffin early one morning at a bustling Starbucks café in New York City. “Women connect right away and they seem to have this instinct to help each other. You feel that everywhere you go,” she says, waving a hand to embrace

the world. “In the States, you feel it. Back home, you feel it. You even feel it on a diplomatic level.”

Zhiri knows a thing or two about how women accomplish things. For the past 15 years, she’s been running a family printing and publishing company in her hometown of Rabat, Morocco, while

devoting time to support younger women in business across the Middle East. “In the beginning, as a freshly graduated MBA, it was very hard for me,” says Zhiri, explaining why she reaches out to other women. “At home, because of the cultural context, a woman has to put in double effort and energy to prove herself — to other

women as well as to men. But once you do, that's it. Recognition is there."

That clear-eyed passion for spearheading social and economic change and the desire to expand her own skills motivated Zhiri to apply to the unique program that returned her to the United States. Years before, she had studied at American University in Washington. Now, Zhiri was in New York for the finale of the Fortune/U.S. State Department Global Women's Mentoring Partnership. Each year, this public/private program selects 30 to 35 up-and-coming women professionals from around the world, pairing them with 50 senior American women from business, academia and government.

Public-Private Partnership Networks Empower New Leaders

The month-long program creatively leverages the resources and expertise of an unusual three-part alliance: an elite roster of American women from companies such as Avon, Wal-Mart, American Express and ExxonMobil who participate in Fortune magazine's annual Most Powerful Women Summit, chaired by Editor-at-Large Pattie Sellers; the international nongovernmental organization Vital Voices, whose mission is to empower emerging women leaders worldwide; and the U.S. State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

The idea was born in 2006 during a meeting between Sellers and then-Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Dina Powell in Washington. The Fortune/U.S. State Department Global Women's Mentoring Partnership was soon launched. It debuted as a three-phase program for 17 women. They received orientation in Washington, individual mentorship around the United States and evaluation in New York. It was an immediate success. Today the program boasts nearly 150 graduates from about 50 countries. Powell, now head of corporate engagement at Goldman Sachs and director of its sister initiative, 10,000 Women, remains a key sponsor.

"The Mentoring Partnership offers women a transformative model of leadership," explains Alyse Nelson, president and CEO of Vital Voices, which is awarded

ECA grants — about \$190,000 in 2010 — to manage on-the-ground logistics. Typically, the women are first-generation professionals who lack role models at home. So the firsthand coaching is an enormous boost, emotionally and practically. Just as importantly, says Nelson, "participants know that top women in Fortune 500 companies don't need to take time and effort for mentoring, but they do. The younger women see the ripple effect of doing well and also doing good. They understand the investment being made in them and their responsibility to give back."

Now in its fifth year, the program is well established. "We cable our embassies and regional bureaus, which identify and nominate local women for the program," says ECA managing director of cultural programs Chris Miner, who oversees thousands of State Department exchange programs. "Obviously, they must have a good command of English," says Miner. "But the women must also be emerging leaders who participate to take their skills, career or business to the next level. These women are destined for success." Pattie Sellers invites high-level American businesswomen to volunteer. Their companies cover one participant's travel and expenses, about \$8,000 each. Working with a Fortune team, Sellers then customizes each match.

"We learn from each other," says Susan Whiting, a four-time mentor and vice chair of the Nielsen Company, the global marketing and media information firm. "For me, it's especially valuable to see the U.S. through their eyes." Paired with Ilham Zhiri this year, Whiting has noticed a pattern among the mentees. "Younger women on their way to success often feel they have to put some parts of themselves aside, and I don't think that's necessarily a good thing in the long term," she says. "To succeed, you need to be true to yourself."

Destined for Success

Reviewing her experience at Nielsen, Zhiri says she's returning to Morocco with two objectives. "First, I've learned ... that I can leverage business opportunities in the North Africa region." The second goal, managing a clear work/life balance, surprised her. "There's



Young Moroccan businesswoman Ilham Zhiri greets mentor Esther Coopersmith, former U.S. representative to the United Nations, at the U.S. State Department Global Mentoring Partnership meeting. *Sharon Farmer/Vital Voices*

a wonderful phrase I learned here — about ‘repotting’ yourself,” says Zhiri. “You need to grow your personal life in order to grow your business. I learned that I don’t have to be so tough on myself.”

The final, fast-paced week in New York was a high-octane mix of media training sessions, entrepreneurship workshops, panel discussions and networking events, hosted by industry leaders.

“I applied to the program because I wanted to see how I measure up compared to leaders in the U.S.,” says Hussan-Bano Burki, a senior manager for USAID in Islamabad.

She works to facilitate trade and develop online marketing tools. “In Pakistan, I’m already known as a good leader and my skills are pretty much there.”

Teamed with Ernst & Young’s Beth A. Brooke, Burki said, “Here, I saw mentors who went beyond professional duties to build networks and pay it forward.” The revelation, for Burki, was seeing how Brooke used her contacts to approach unfamiliar sources and facilitate policy. “Within the first few days at E&Y, I recognized that I’d been missing the idea of using networks as assets and how I need to be less bashful about asking for help. Beth

connected to so many institutions and people relevant to things I’ve done. The practical power of that was a great lesson.” All in all, Burki adds, “I learned what’s important to rise up professionally.”

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